

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY BUJUMBUURA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6308

INFO AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY KIGALI

C O N F I D E N T I A L BUJUMBURA 0726

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SHUM, PGOV, PINS, BY

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT BAGAZA'S COMMENTS ON HUMAN RIGHTS MATTERS

REF: BUJUMBURA 0723

1. REFTEL NOTES THAT DURING MY LONG CONVERSATION WITH PRESIDENT BAGAZA ON JUNE 23, HE CONFIRMED HIS CONTINUED DEDICATION TO A POLICY OF PURSUING HUTU-TUTSI RECONCILIATION IN BURUNDI. IN FACT, HE WENT FURTHER TO SAY THAT MAKING THE HUTU MASSES FEEL THAT THEY WERE GETTING A FAIR SHAKE WAS AN INDISPENSABLE PREREQUISITE TO REALIZATION OF HIS WHOLE REFORM PROGRAM. HE DID NOT RPT NOT SHARE THE VIEWS OF SOME MORE ETHNICALLY ORIENTED TUTSI OFFICIALS WHO WORRIED ABOUT MISSIONARY WORK AMONG THE HUTUS, BECAUSE THAT WAS A NATURAL CONSEQUENCE OF THE POPULATION RATIO. HE WAS GLAD, SPECIFICALLY, THAT THE PERCENTAGE OF HUTU STUDENTS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS WAS AGAIN BECOMING SIGNIFICANT (IT IS UP TO NE QUARTER IN BURUNDI'S MOST ELITE HIGH SCHOOL) AND HE HOPED IT WOULD RISE FURTHER. HOWEVER, IN RESPONSE TO MY QUESTION, HE SAID THAT THE REGIME WAS NOT RPT NOT YET READY TO TACKLE THE QUESTION OF BRINGING HUTUS BACK INTO THE ARMY. IT WAS JUST TOO SENSITIVE AN ISSUE, AND TO DO SO WOULD
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DESTABILIZE RATHER THAN IMPROVE ETHNIC RELATIONS.

2. I ASKED BAGAZA WHY THE 80 OR SO MEN ARRESTED EARLY IN FEBRUARY ON CHARGES OF CORRUPTION AND EMBEZZLEMENT UNDER THE OLD REGIME HAD NOT RPT NOT YET BEEN BROUGHT TO TRIAL. INDEED, I HAD HEARD THAT THE ORMER HEAD OF THE SUPREME COURT, LEONARD NDUWAYO, HAD RESIGNED IN MAY BECAUSE JUSTICE WAS SO SLOW, BECAUSE

THE JUSTICE MINISTER WANTED TO BE SURE BEFORE TRIALS STARTED THAT JUDGES WOULD RENDER A GUILTY VERDICT, AND BECAUSE THE TRIAL OF MICOMBERO'S JUSTICE MINISTER FOR MURDER HAD BEEN STOPPED IN APRIL WHEN IT LOOKED AS IF A NOT RPT NOT GUILTY VERDICT WOULD BE FORTHCOMING. MOREOVER, A BELGIAN BUSINESSMAN HAD BEEN JAILED FOR EIGHT WEEKS WITHOUT ANY ACCUSATION AT ALL.

3. BAGAZA SAID THAT TRIALS OF THE 80 WOULD BEGIN AS SOON AS POSSIBLE WHEN THE PROSECUTION HAD COMPLETED PREPARATIONS. HOWEVER, SINCE BURUNDI LACKED SUFFICIENT LEGAL PERSONNEL, THERE MIGHT PASS MANY MORE MONTHS BEFORE COURTROOM PROCEEDINGS. HE THOUGHT BAIL (WHICH I HAD SUGGESTED) WOULD BE QUITE IMPRACTICAL IN THESE CASES. AS FOR NDUWAYO'S RESIGNATION, IT WAS TOO BAD SINCE HE (BAGAZA) ADMIRE NDUWAYO'S COURAGE AND DEDICATION TO THE LAW. HOWEVER, NDUWAYO HAD WANTED TO BE WHOLLY INDEPENDENT OF THE GOVERNMENT IN THESE JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS, AND THAT WAS IMPOSSIBLE

THESE WERE INTENSELY POLITICAL MATTERS (REFTTEL) WHICH INVOLVED THE REGIME'S STABILITY AND THE CREDIBILITY OF ITS BASIC POLICY TO END CORRUPTION AND FAVORITISM TO THE RICH IN BURUNDI.

4. WE CHATTED A BIT ABOUT MEDIA FREEDOM TO CRITICIZE THE REGIME, AND I NOTED SEVERAL RECENT INCIDENTS OF NEWS SUPPRESSION WHICH SHOWED GROWING GOVERNMENT SENSITIVITY TO DIVERGENT VIEWS. BAGAZA DID NOT RPT NOT ANSWER DIRECTLY, BUT HE ARGUED THAT SOME CONTROLS WERE NECESSARY IN A SOCIETY WITH SO MUCH FACTION-CONFIDENTIAL

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ALSIM, BACKBITING, AND LACK OF COMMUNITY SPIRIT. BESIDES, JOURNALISTS HERE WERE YOUNG, INEXPERIENCED, AND WANTING IN MATURE JUDGMENT ABOUT NEWS COVERAGE. HE PERSONALLY DESIRED SUCH FREEDOMS TO GROW, AND HE SPPORTED THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION'S ATTENTION TO HUMAN RIGHTS. HOWEVER, BURUNDI'S SPECIAL HISTORY AND CIRCUMSTANCES MADE SOME RESTRICTIONS NECESSARY AT PRESENT. HE HOPED THERE COULD BE A GRADUAL EVOLUTION TO GREATER FREEDOM AS NATIONAL UNITY WAS REESTABLISHED AND AS THE POPULACE BECAME MORE MATURE ABOUT POLITICAL ISSUES. MARK

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